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ABSTRACT

A brief overview of the development of Polish education since the Second World War precedes a discussion of preschool education in Poland. The education of very young children is viewed seriously in Poland and has become a socially approved part of the system of education. Discussion focuses on the structure of preschool education, financing, and the curriculum, as well as types of preschool programs, including several kinds of kindergartens and the infant schools. An example of a kindergarten lesson is provided. Children were taught the letters (k), (o), and (t) over a period of 2 or 3 days in steps involving language development/auditory discrimination, auditory-visual discrimination, making words, and reading and writing words. (RH)

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Preschool Education in Poland

Florence T. Pieronek

Before discussing preschool education it is necessary to present the reader with a brief overview of post World War II developments in Polish education, in order to comprehend the magnitude of what has been accomplished in 40 years.

Background Information

After World War II, Poland was faced with approximately 1 million illiterate people accompanied by almost a non-existent school system. In addition, it was estimated that over 60% of the pre-war educational buildings were destroyed; most of the school library books were destroyed. Furthermore, they were faced with organizing school systems in territories that were once occupied by other nations prior to World War II. Because of the existing critical situation, rebuilding and development of an educational system became an important task.

During the initial post war years the target task was to establish a seven-year educational programme. To accomplish the task it became necessary to staff schools with simply any person who was available to teach; shorten school programmes; organize centres to educate the illiterate over 50 years of age; and to create a system of child and youth care that would accommodate the enormous number of war orphans.

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By 1961 a compulsory 8-year elementary programme was introduced. Because the economy dictated that women become part of the work force, nursery/kindergarten education developed rapidly. Preschool education in Poland has gained the rank of high importance, a socially approved part of the system of education. Table I presents the growth of nursery schools 1937-1975.

INSERT TABLE I

TABLE I

*Rate of Growth of Polish Nursery Schools 1937-1975

Number of learners in thousands			
1937 - 38	1946 - 47	1957 - 58	1974 - 1975
83	202	351	886

*Obtained from the Ministry of Education, Warsaw, Poland, 1981.

Education Structure of Preschool Education

The preschool educational system in Poland is based on the soviet model and functions within the legislative framework of the system of Education and Upbringing Development Act passed July 15, 1961. The act stipulated that early assistance should be provided to the child within the context of his/her family situation and under the goal of securing his/her proper development. All education is mandated by the Communist Party and carried out by its Ministry of Education and Upbringing and its Ministry of Education and Higher Education. Curriculum and instructional materials are prescribed and furnished from the central government. There is a close tie between educational policy and the overall economic development policy. It is believed that preschools are the first link in the processing of children into Polish citizens of tomorrow. The specific aims of the preschool that are placed within the content of the larger political system are:

- To prepare children for school by furthering their education and their physical and social development.
- To assist the working mother by providing safe and healthful care of the child.
- To introduce children to the society in which they live including the beginning of vocational skill training.

Under the umbrella term, preschool, there appears a dual system for educating young children in Poland. One system referred to as nurseries provide care for young children, 0 to

3 years old. This system under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare is supervised by the Department of Health and Kindergartens. The second system referred to as preschool classes, 3 - 7 years old, is under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Education who sets national policy and allocates funds. The school superintendent, and inspectors at the regional and district levels provide general supervision at the district level. In addition there are also inspectors for kindergarten classes.

Financing

Revenues come from one principle source, the Central Government. The amount of monies, zlotys, allocated for education is determined administratively at the Federal Cabinet level. Both the Ministry of Education and Ministry of Higher Schools and Technology are members of the cabinet that approves budgetary levels for all ministries. The Ministry of Education then distributes monies, zlotys, to the intermediate government units, voivodships. Each voivodship has a Department of Education referred to as the Curatorium. The Director of the Curatorium known as the curator negotiates with the Ministry of Education for particular voivodship funding.

It may be assumed that the major cost of preschool education is financed by the Ministry of Education. However, in each kindergarten there is an existing fee system. Fees range from a minimum of 60 zlotys to a maximum of 70 zlotys. The criteria for specific fees is dependent on a family's total income.

Types of Preschool Programs

Although there is much concern that children residing in rural areas are not sufficiently ready for formal schooling most preschool centres are concentrated in urban centres. Most of the housing developments have a preschool centre. To maximize the possibility of a greater number of children attending preschool education, ages 3 - 7, several types of centres have been established:

- Parttime kindergartens - Flexible hours.
- All day kindergartens. The child spends 9 - 10 hours at the centre during the time the mother is working.
- Live-in kindergartens. The child spends Sunday night or arrives Monday morning and stays in the centre for the entire week.
- Flexible time schedule. The hours spent at the centre is in direct proportion with the time the mother spends at work.
- Kindergarten hearths. These centres are attached to either an elementary school or kindergarten proper. The centre prepares children about to enter elementary school.
- Infant schools. These centres are attached to an elementary school and functions like a kindergarten.
- Seasonal kindergartens. These are centres organized in villages during harvest time when mothers are engaged in farming and are mainly for children who

do not attend year round kindergartens.

However, a dual criteria, age of child and family status, is used to determine priority for preschool enrolment. Preference is given to single parents, teachers, 6 year olds, and low income families. Approximately 50% of the kindergarten children are in preschools with the highest percentage, approximately 90%, enrolled in the year prior to school entrance.

Curriculum

During 1977-78 a new curriculum was introduced at the preschool, age 6 level. The major aims are:

- To provide for each learner suitable conditions for personal individual development, independent thinking, and positive attitude toward school requirements.
- To provide conditions to develop individual intellectual development.
- To develop and enhance speech development.
- To introduce the learner to reading.
- To introduce and prepare the learner for writing.
- To introduce the learner to the basic mathematical concepts.
- To enhance cultural development through introduction to art and music.
- To provide simple exercises and opportunity for experimenting to enhance the development of observation and problem solving skills (Wienskowski, 1982).

In the new program the preparation focuses on those skills that may be considered basic skills for learning the Polish Language. Within the program emphasis is placed on developing the following skills: 1) listening, 2) ability to pay attention, 3) ability to express oneself, 4) ability to discriminate sounds, 5) ability to understand and read short stories, and 6) the ability to express ideas.

The above skills taught in the preschool year are divided into two major components. In the first part of that year skills directly related to oral language components are taught.

The above skills taught in the kindergarten year, age 6, are divided into two major components, 1) Oral language development. Skills related to this component are taught in the first part of the year, and 2) Reading and Writing the Polish Language. Skills related to this component are emphasized in the second part of the year.

During the second component 22 out of the total 36 letters are introduced along with 8 vowel sounds. Although Polish is not purely a phonetic language the learner's initial teachings involve the purely phonetic aspects of the language. In the majority of instances, a phonetic approach is employed and learners are taught a method of synthesis. Reading and writing are taught simultaneously in the lesson.

Example of Kindergarten Lesson

During the classroom visit the author observed a lesson in which the letters

k	o	t
---	---	---

 were being taught. The lesson is taught over a period of two or three days.

The Suggested Steps

Step One: Language Development/Auditory Discrimination.

This step includes numerous activities that focus on language development and auditory discrimination of initial consonant sounds.

Through the use of pictures, films, and teacher prepared aids, students elicit words beginning with the same letter. No visual stimulus, letters are presented on this step.

Step Two: Auditory-Visual Discrimination

During this step, emphasis is placed on the association of the specific letter being taught and its representative sound. The word is placed on the board

k	o	t
---	---	---

K	O	T
---	---	---

 = cat

The word is presented in both upper case and lower case letters. Focus is placed on each letter and discussed relative to the sound representation in the word.

Practice in producing the letter/s become a very important part of the lesson. Letters are formed using plasticine, painting the letters, sewing letters on prepared cards, and using the sandbox.

Step Three: Making Words

Using a constructed teacher/parent kit that contains multiple copies of letters, the children using these letters make the word k o t. Then working in pairs, they use other letters learned previously to make other words beginning with k. Sometimes pictures are introduced to stimulate making words.

Sometimes the students are encouraged to look around the classroom for items that begin with the letter being taught. The teacher prints these on the board. The children using prepared letters from the kit make the word matching kit 'letters' and the word on the board.

Step Four: Reading and Writing Words

Using the workbook the students learn to write (cursive) the word. The pictures found in the workbook are used to create short stories relative to the word introduced. Some sentences are written into the learner's notebook. Both chalkboard stories and written sentences are read by the children.

From the discussion presented in the paper, it appears that preschool education is considered to be one of the most important phases within the Polish Educational System. Very specific guidelines are set out by the Ministry of Education and Upbringing and the Ministry of Education and Higher Education. Inspectors at regional and district levels ensure that aims within the kindergarten curriculum are carried out. The new curriculum proposed in 1977-78 proposed for kindergarten children, age 6, includes some of the language/reading skills formerly introduced in grade one. Finally, from observed lessons in kindergarten classrooms techniques used to teach specific Polish letters closely resemble many of the those presently used in North American classrooms.

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